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AN INDIVIDUALIZED ENGLISH PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN AND SOPHOMORES.

BY- JAQUETTE, CHARLES
COLORADO STATE DEPT. OF EDUCATION, DENVER

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AN INDIVIDUALIZED ENGLISH PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN AND SOPHOMORES WAS ESTABLISHED AT MEEKER, COLORADO, DURING THE 1963-64 SCHOOL YEAR. THIS REPORT DESCRIBES THE ACTIVITIES, PROBLEMS, SUCCESSES, RECOMMENDATIONS, EVALUATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE PROGRAM. (JH)

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COLORADO WESTERN STATES SMALL SCHOOLS PROJECT

DOCUMENTATION

AN INDIVIDUALIZED ENGLISH PROGRAM FOR
HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN AND SOPHOMORES

Charles Jaquette
Meeker, Colorado

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COLO. STATE DEPT. OF
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BYRON W. HANSFORD
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THE WESTERN STATES SMALL SCHOOLS PROJECT

The Western States Small Schools Project, partly financed by a grant from the Ford Foundation, is designed to help the state education agencies in Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah in their efforts to improve instruction in the necessarily existent small schools. The Project began January, 1961 and will end August, 1965. Policy Board of the Project is composed of the chief state school officers of the cooperating states. Ralph G. Bohrson, Coordinator of the WSSSP, is headquartered in Denver, at the Colorado State Department of Education.

The Colorado portion of the Project, involving more than two hundred teachers and administrators in approximately thirty schools has been working in the following areas:

-- Ungraded or Continuous Progress Programs

-- Use of Self-Instructional Materials

-- Teacher Education and In-Service Programs

-- Institutes for Rural School Board Members

For additional information concerning the Colorado WSSSP, contact:

Paul M. Nachtigal, Director
Colorado Western States Small Schools Project
State Department of Education
Denver, Colorado 80203

I. TITLE

An individualized English program for high school Freshmen and Sophomores.

II. INTRODUCTION

The experiment described here was an attempt to discover the problems and successes which would be experienced under the complete individualization of the high school Freshman and Sophomore English programs.

For purposes of this experiment, English I and English II students were integrated into common classes. The reasoning here was that if the students were working on a strictly individual basis, age levels of the students within a class were irrelevant.

III. PROCEDURE

The experiment was set up in the following manner:

A. English I and II students signed up for common classes in the fall. There were four sections of English I and II offered, and the student signed up for whichever class fitted into his schedule. There were about 80 English I and II students.

B. Each student worked on his own individual assignment at his own speed.

C. Assignments dealt with the four main areas of English study--reading writing, speaking, listening--and sub-areas such as journalism, speech, creative writing, expository writing, language, study of poetry, essays, drama, etc.

D. Assignments were created by the student, by the teacher, or jointly.

E. Homework assignments were turned in by the student as he finished them, graded by the teacher, returned, and often discussed by student and teacher together.

F. Students didn't work in the same area at the same time, except co-incidentally.

G. Teacher lectures were conducted in the following manner:

1. Lecture time was limited to a discussion of those problems which the teacher deemed of common interest.

2. Limited to a discussion of new material which would be of common interest to all students.
3. Teacher lecture was to serve primarily as a jumping off point from which students could pursue their own individual activities.
4. Lecture time was reduced to provide maximum time for individual instruction.

H. Student accomplishments were plotted on some kind of a record sheet (this varied in form from time to time), which the student filed in the English room in hi personal folder. This folder also contained all the student's work for the grading period.

I. This form and the student's work in the folder were analyzed by the teacher and the student at the end of each grading period to determine the student's mark for that period.

J. Because the students were working independently of direct teacher supervision, an attempt was made to supply a wide variety of materials for student use. They included the following:

1. Reading materials: traditional anthologies, approximately four-hundred paperbacks covering a variety of subjects, magazines (both in the central school library and in the classroom), cloth bound books (central library and classroom library), student-supplied books, teacher-supplied books, and others.
2. Recordings: fiction, poetry, drama, language.
3. Filmstrips: literary, language, grammar.
4. Programed materials: English 3200 grammar, EDL Word Clues vocabulary, teacher-made poetry program.
5. Other central library resources.

6. Equipment: tape recorders, record players, headsets for individual listening, filmstrip projectors.

K. Tests were given over work (vocabulary, grammar, literature, lectures, etc.) the student had completed. Two methods were employed for administering the tests: (1) when the student had completed the work, (2) on Fridays.

IV. PROCEDURE, CONTINUED

Teacher and student activities in the experiment are typified by the following:

A. Teacher activities.

1. Teacher lecture included the following: reading stories or poetry, discussing authors; lecturing on punctuation and capitalization when it seemed to apply to a majority of the group; language and language history; composition techniques.

2. Individual instruction included the following: conferring with individual students when they had questions on work projects, grammar, composition, vocabulary, etc.; helping students create assignments and work projects; moving around the room to help those who were reticent about asking for help; readying equipment and materials for student use.

3. Paper grading included collecting student assignments (turned in when they were completed), grading them, and conferring with the student about the corrected assignment.

4. The teacher prepared and administered tests.

B. Student activities.

1. Listening to lectures was done in the following manner: the student was required to listen to the teacher lecture and participate in the accompanying class discussion to the best of his ability. He then had the option of using the lecture as a starting point for individual branching activities. The student also had the option of taking a test over the lecture.

2. Individual assignments were done in the following manner: The student or teacher or both would select the work project for the student to do. Then the student would work on the assignment independently of the class and independently of direct teacher supervision.

This meant that the English students during any given class period might be listening to recordings, listening to tapes, viewing filmstrips, working in programed texts, writing compositions, studying vocabulary, reading, rehearsing or giving oral presentations, etc.

3. Conferring with the teacher was done by the student when he received a paper back and had questions, when he wanted advice about his work project, or when he wanted suggestions for further work projects.

4. Taking tests. In case the student wanted to take a test over literature for which no tests had been prepared, he normally wrote a critical discussion of the work to hand in as he did other homework assignments.

V. RESULTS

Scant objective evaluation is available on this experiment. Subjective evaluation by the teacher will be treated in three sections: evaluation of student accomplishment, of student behavior, of the classroom organization.

A. Accomplishments of faster students were, understandably, satisfying in amount and quality. Some of these work projects included the following: a detailed history of Meeker High School (the only one in existence; information gathered from county and district records and board minutes); a penetrating study of E. E. Cummings which was presented to the class in three twenty-minute oral presentations; a comparison of Greek tragedy with Shakespearean tragedy.

Accomplishments of average students were acceptable by quantative standards. Most students averaged more than a writing per week, and the ability of these students to do expository writing such as news stories for the school paper improved noticeably.

Slower students, probably because of practiced reticense, were somewhat ignored. However, in some isolated cases quite satisfactory improvement could be observed. This improvement mainly took the form of speech activities: discussing and reading poetry, reviewing books, persuasive speeches and debates.

One of the most satisfying aspects of student accomplishment was the improvement in the ability of the student to create his own projects. During the year many students improved in their ability to develop creative and worthwhile work projects.

B. Student behavior was, not surprisingly, different than in the traditional classroom. Students, by the nature of the experiment, did a great deal of independent study, and the ability of the student to take this responsibility varies as widely as his ability to read or do algebra.

Some students could be trusted to leave the room or even the building and take advantage of their time. Others were capable of handling limited freedom, say to leave the room to go to the library with the teacher's permission. Others had to remain in the room and be closely supervised.

Major discipline problems ran to excessive idleness rather than to insubordination or maliciousness.

C. Classroom organization was the least successful aspect of the experiment. The loosely organized, permissive nature of the experiment, whereby the student, in general, had almost unlimited freedom, led to a lack of direction in both the student and teacher. While the students generally worked well, they had a lost feeling about what their overall purposes and objectives were. This probably seriously detracted from the overall success of the program.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the experiment was largely to discover problems associated with this type of individualization. Several problems defined themselves during the course of the year:

A. Classroom organization must be rigid enough to give direction and a foundation for operations, yet loose enough to permit creativity and individuality in work projects. A suggestion would be to have a relatively rigid weekly schedule: test on Friday, lecture on Monday and Wednesday, etc.

Objectives of the course should be kept firmly in mind by the teacher and the student. Perhaps a sheet briefly outlining the goals and the procedures in attaining them should be in the hands of the students. This sheet should be explained periodically to the group. "This is where we are going" lectures should be given regularly.

B. Freedom to choose work assignments and to move about physically should be granted on an individual basis. The teacher should begin slowly by granting the group limited freedom of choice and movement. Wider independence should be given to a student when he demonstrates the ability to handle the freedom and denied when he doesn't have the ability.

C. One problem is the psychological adjustment a teacher must make in switching from a lecture method to the individualized structure. The teacher is inclined to feel that he is not doing his job properly when he only talks to individual students and doesn't lecture from the front of the room.

D. The student may feel that the one-to-one situation is not the proper learning situation. He may be either disinclined to talk or feel he must hurry through the interview. The individualized situation and the student's responsibility in it should be explained at the outset. Also, through conscious effort by the teacher the student should be made to feel that he is welcome to talk to the teacher and that here is where he receives a good share of his instruction.

E. The teacher must make a conscious effort to keep in touch with all students. The teacher may move around the room checking on the student and his work, and he may also jot down problems as he is checking homework papers.

He can then refer to this list of names and problems for conferences with the students later on.

F. Visual and aural distraction can be a problem to a significant number of students. The freedom of movement and freedom to work in small groups inherent in the individualized situation will be distracting to many students. The recommendation here is that the furnishings of the room afford visual and, if possible, aural isolation to those who need it. Study carrels of the conventional type and even sound-proof, telephone-booth-like stalls would be the answer here.

VII. CONCLUSION

Although there are problems associated with converting the traditional classroom to an individualized situation, confronting these problems seems to be a worthwhile effort for the following reasons:

1. The individualized classroom organization affords the teacher a greater opportunity to confer with all students.
2. Less time can be spent in lecturing on subject matter which some students already know and which others can't hope to understand.
3. Individualization allows the student to range more widely in the study of communication than is common in the traditional classroom.